



Book Review

Jane Martin

Gender and Education in England since 1770: A Social and Cultural History

Cham: Palgrave Macmillan

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Gender and Education in England since 1770. A Social and Cultural History by Jane Martin (2022) is part of the Palgrave book series *Gender and Education*. This series is described to reimagine history; it aims to use gender as an analytical category in historical research. Important perspectives include the cultural constructions and fluidity of sexuality and gender, and intersectionality in the realms of culture, race, politics, economy, and religion. Martin's contribution to this series is in line with this objective. The central aim of her book is to bring 'the past into a critical dialogue with the present' (p. 1) regarding the complex and often subliminal interrelatedness of ideas of gender, culture, and power within English education. Gendered analysis of historical events is combined with biographical accounts with the goal to bring 'hitherto marginalised moments and experiences to the fore' (p. 2). With this, Martin aims to provide a 'historicised, gender-sensitive and intersectional approach' (p. 19) for current policy and practice through the approach of historical ethnography. The book's fundamental concept of *gender* is defined 'as a social identity originating in the individual, includ-

ing a deep-seated psychological state, as the result of cultural, social and environmental influences' (p. 2) and thus puts the intersection between social structures and the lives of individuals into focus.

This definition allocating gender within the individual seems not entirely suitable to Martin's other concepts which are derived from sociological rather than psychological considerations. A definition such as Joan Scott's (1986, p. 1067), who frames gender as constitutive of social relationships and as a signifier of power relations, might have made the concept of gender more congruent with the rest of Martin's study and its historical approach.

Gender and Education in England since 1770 does not follow a historical chronology but rather aims to show 'histories of contradiction and ambiguity' (p. 3) in the education of children of differing social situatedness. The book's nine chapters are organised in three larger topical sections. Part I, *Politics and Policies*, provides the foundation of the study as whole. The first section therein lays out key concepts in reference to a wide corpus of previous research on gender and the social. Emphasis is put on Connell's adaptation of Gramsci's concept of hegemony to conceptualise the 'gender order'. Furthermore, the Bordieuan notion of habitus as guiding tendencies of behaviour and thought, and as a nexus between public and private lives is used to think gender generationally (chapter 2). Chapter 3 provides con-

text on the historical development of the education system and its gender and class demarcation, while chapters 4 and historicise contemporary meritocratic notions of education from a class and gender perspective respectively.

Part II, *Learners and Learning*, begins with chapter 6 exploring 'women's involvement in curriculum contestation and critique' (p. 158) and the hurdles involved which often remains overlooked in conventional curriculum history. Chapter 7 zooms in on biographical accounts by girls and boys. They help to highlight on a micro level processes of subjectivation to 'tangled gender identities' (p. 186) which are interwoven with challenges of achieving academic success and social acceptance. The voices of tertiary education students are studied in chapter 8 to gain insights into the historical changes of university life regarding gender and class relations.

Part III is focused on *Teachers and Teaching*. Chapter 9 examines the ambition of female teachers to organise and advocate for themselves and for their pupils, as well as to 'articulate a gender-free professionalism' (p. 242) in a highly gendered workspace. Chapter 10 is a critical reflection on feminists' endeavours to build 'a culture of democracy through radical approaches to curriculum and pedagogy' (p. 267). Martin addresses the limits of past decades' feminist pedagogy and highlights the emerging attention to intersectionality, without diminishing the significant achievements of feminism in education nor downplaying the hostility against feminist activists and initiatives.

In the concluding chapter, Martin addresses a wide range of entangled issues in today's education regarding gender, including very topical matters in the year of publication 2022. This is an impressive and thoughtful conclusion which summarises and condenses the essence of the book's analysis satisfactorily to the reader, but also opens up a vast space for further consideration on 'our current gender system and how it interacts with other systems, like race social class and ability' (p. 274). Martin claims that the 'gendering the educational landscape' offers a perspective to 'challenge the long-standing biases and omissions that limit how we understand politics and society' and reimagine the future (p. 283). Some of her demands include the creation of a cultural context that allows to look beyond what is considered common sense and to create awareness of the power embedded in the telling of history. Particularly, gender democratisation and education for civic participation are offered as strategies to leave the trodden paths of gendered power and to challenge notions of heteronormativity.

It is questionable to me whether this optimistic view of education as a motor of societal change is not a pitfall. Of course, the creation of spaces where learners can be 'together as equals, with respect and empathy' (p. 284) is a valid desire, congruent with the ideals of democracy. However, as has been shown in previous research, school reform tends not keeping its promises to be the driving agent of social reform (Labaree, 2008). Thus, the hope for improved, gender-sensitive and democratic education expressed

by Martin is understandable, however, her concluding words on the entanglement of gendered bias in schooling might have benefited from a critical view upon the power of promise within education itself (Depaepe and Smeyers, 2008).

With *Gender and Education in England since 1770. A Social and Cultural History*, Jane Martin has provided the field of history of education with a valuable and inspiring contribution which places the histories of women, girls, and the working-class centre stage. A valuable aspect of this book is Martin's thorough theoretical contextualisation and discussion which can serve as a great resource for further research. Martin's approach of historical ethnography and the rigorous use of gender and class perspectives on England's educational history sheds light on the lives and experiences of groups which are often times left out of traditional historiography of schooling and educational knowledge. The attention to marginalised experience, the analysis of everyday life and subjectivity in the processes of educational politics and thought enriches the field and highlights the necessity of considering the impact of the interwovenness of gender, class, and education in both past and present.

References

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